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ABSTRACT

The extent to which gifted and talented students participated in Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option was investigated via a survey of 26 gifted students who transferred to nonresident schools and comparison of results with those of a survey of 60 students without special needs. Results indicated that academic and educational concerns were some of the main reasons that prompted gifted students to transfer. Specific concerns were provision of more advanced courses, more course variety, better teachers, and stronger academic reputation. The most valuable sources of information about the open enrollment option were the mass media and the school principal. Parents of students with special talents moderately increased their involvement at their chosen school compared to their former school. Most parents expressed satisfaction with the option, though many experienced transportation problems. (Contains 23 references.) (JDD)

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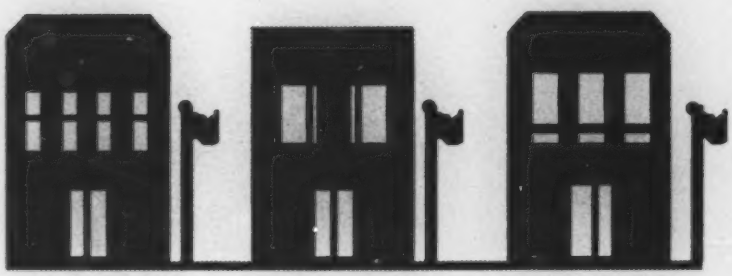
Research Report No. 11



Enrollment Options for Students with Disabilities

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The College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

August, 1993

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Abstract

The extent to which students who were identified as gifted and talented participated in Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option was investigated. Information was drawn from surveys on 26 students who were identified as gifted and talented and who transferred to non-resident schools through Open Enrollment during the 1990-91 school year. Parental involvement in school before and after the transfer, reasons for transferring, and other experiences in exercising the option were studied. The results were compared to those of students without special needs (n=60). Parents of students with special talents moderately increased their involvement at their chosen school. Academic and educational concerns were some of the main reasons that prompted these students to transfer. The most valuable sources of information about the option were the mass media and the school principal. Most parents expressed satisfaction with the option; yet, many experienced transportation problems. Important applications for these findings are discussed.

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The Participation of Students Who Are Identified as Gifted and Talented in Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option

When *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, it created a wave of shock and desperation that led to a call for educational reform across the nation. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) blamed the decline in educational performance largely on the educational process, specifically, inadequacies in content, expectations, time, and teaching. Consequently, most efforts in this "first" wave of reforms focused on the process of education: teacher certification, salaries, class size, curricula, and time spent in school. In the meantime, another small but persistent voice was calling for improvement of educational standards by allowing students and their families to select the type of school they wanted. This became known as "school choice."

The concept of school choice, in fact, has been around for quite a long time and has been implemented in various forms. For instance, a call for educational vouchers went out as early as the 1950s, and the 1960s witnessed efforts to desegregate inner city schools through magnet and specialty programs (Cibulka, 1990). These programs together with open enrollment, postsecondary enrollment programs, and alternative schools created another wave of reforms in education. This wave of reform, school choice, has gained momentum and become one of the most visible educational reform movements of the 1990s.

The visibility of school choice is credited, at least in part, to government officials. The National Governors'

Association (1986) recommended public school choice as the vehicle for achieving excellence in education. Supported by many state officials, school choice initiatives in various forms have been proposed or passed in more than 25 state legislatures (Education Commission of the States, 1989). The federal government has also actively promoted school choice. The Center for Choice in Education, established by the U.S. Department of Education, offers information and assistance on educational choice. Besides the center, the department has set up a toll-free choice hotline; held symposia, seminars, and workshops on parental choice; created a resource bank of people for information, consultation, and advice in establishing choice programs; and disseminated information on educational choice through brochures and other media. President Bush repeatedly asserted the importance of school choice when discussing American educational reforms.

Among different forms of school choice, public school choice has recently received much attention. This educational option aims to empower students and their parents to select from available *public* schools. This option has taken different forms in different states, and may involve a few, or all schools within a district or state. In some states (e.g., Massachusetts), intradistrict open enrollment programs let students select within their resident school district. Other states (e.g., Minnesota) offer interdistrict open enrollment in which students can transfer across district lines for their educational choice.

People's reasons for supporting public school choice often depend on individual philosophy and personal commitment. Some

educators contend that public school choice would empower students, parents, and teachers to become more involved in education; allow differentiated schools to accommodate human diversity; and create controlled competition for improving educational standards (Clinchy, 1989; Mueller, 1987; Nathan, 1990; Raywid, 1987). Skeptically, some educators and scholars raise concerns about the potential pitfalls of choice. Some fear that the brightest students and teachers may be "creamed off" and disadvantaged students may be "dumped" in the "unpopular" schools. Others argue that only under ideal conditions in which all students and parents are well informed, able to "shop around," and given equal access to schools without geographical and other limitations, can educational choice benefit <u>all</u> students. They fear that a school district could be crippled economically and educationally by a large number of students leaving the district for reasons unrelated to educational concerns (Bastian, 1990; Finch, 1989; Martin, 1991; Moore & Davenport, 1990).

As debates on the merits of public school choice continue, its impact on students with special needs -- such as those identified as gifted and talented -- have rarely been discussed in the literature, even though advocates of gifted education are every bit as concerned about educational reforms as are school choice proponents. One major concern for those interested in gifted education is the lack of challenge in the school curriculum (Reiss, 1989; Renzulli & Reiss, 1991). Given the interest in expanding the curriculum for students who are identified as gifted and talented, the question arises as to whether public school

choice would give them a better chance to reach their academic goals. Although some argue that a differentiated learning experience aids in "maintaining [giftedness] identity" (Renzulli & Reiss, 1991), other advocates of gifted education call for educational excellence for all children (e.g., Treffinger, 1991; Whitmore, 1988). With the advent of more liberal public school choice opportunities, would competing for students who are identified as gifted and talented help raise educational standards? Or would such choice create further segregation and discrimination by ability, and make the nightmare of the "dumping ground" come true? These questions go to the heart of the debate on the merits of school choice in education. To answer them we cannot rely on theoretical arguments; instead, we must find out what actually is happening. An essential question to ask is about the extent to which students who are identified as gifted and talented take advantage of public school choice. Other questions include: What are the characteristics of these students? Do they and their families differ from other participants in public school choice? How did they know about educational options, and why did they want to pursue an alternative?

Minnesota has been a leader in school choice reform. Currently, seven option programs allow students to choose a school or program. The Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program (PSEO) allows 11th and 12th grade students to attend a postsecondary institute for free. The High School Graduation Incentives Program (HSGI) allows qualifying students who are at risk of dropping out of schools to earn the credits required for a high school diploma

by choosing a variety of education options. The Area Learning Center (ALC) Program and the Public or Private Alternative School Program offer personalized programs with alternative methods of instruction to help participants complete a high school diploma. The Education Program for Pregnant Minors and Minor Parents encourages teenage parents and expectant mothers to finish high school. Charter Schools allow teachers with innovative ideas to form and operate an independent public school. Finally, the Open Enrollment Option program lets students apply to transfer to a school outside their resident school district as long as space is available and such transfer will not upset the desegregation effort. Minnesota's statewide interdistrict open enrollment program was the first in the nation. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, over 8,000 students transferred to non-resident schools through Open Enrollment during the 1991-1992 school year. This natural laboratory provides an excellent opportunity to observe the impact of school choice on students and on school districts.

In this paper, we report the results of an investigation of the extent to which students who are identified as gifted and talented participate in the Open Enrollment Option. We compare option participants with special talents and those without special needs drawing from separate studies by the Minnesota Department of Education and the University of Minnesota's Enrollment Options for Students with Disabilities Project. Our study addressed the following research questions:

- To what extent do students who are identified as gifted and talented participate in the Open Enrollment Option?
- To what extent do students who are identified as gifted and talented and those without special needs differ in demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, geographic location, family income, and parental education level?
- To what extent do the families of two types of students differ in their sources of information?
- Is parental involvement in school different between student types, and before and after school transfer?
- Do the two types of students give different reasons for transferring schools?
- What are the experiences of students who are identified as gifted and talented in exercising the Open Enrollment Option?

These questions were addressed by examining the data from the two studies.

Study 1: Survey of Parents of Students with Special Needs in Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option

The first study involved an in-depth survey that asked families about their Open Enrollment experiences and the impact of these experiences. This information was later compared to that of students without special needs.

Method

Participants

The Open Enrollment application form contains a section for students to specify any special education needs. Applications were made available to us by the Minnesota Department of Education. Only those students who reported a need for a gifted and talented program and who applied for transfer through Open Enrollment for the 1990-91 school year were included in this study.

Instrument

The survey consisted of 21 items. Most items asked respondents to choose from a list of answers, though many allowed for open-ended responses. Parents had space to comment about their participation in Open Enrollment at the end of the survey. Four types of information were gathered in this survey: demographic information, sources of information about the Open Enrollment Option, parental involvement in school before and after the school transfer, and the decision-making process related to Open Enrollment.

Procedure

Three hundred and forty-seven surveys were mailed to 295 families of children with special needs. Seventy-one percent (N=248) were returned with complete information. Among these 248 students, 26 were reported as gifted with no other special education needs. Those 26 surveys provided our information about the Open Enrollment experience and its effects on the families of students who were identified as gifted and talented. According to

the U.S. Department of Education, 7.9% (about 6,000 students) of the school-aged population in Minnesota were served under gifted and talented programs in 1988. Twenty-six students with gifts and talents out of over 6,000 enrollment applicants does not seem to be a significant number; however, many of these students may not identify themselves as having special needs on their applications. Consequently, the number of students with gifts and talents participating in the option is likely to be under-reported.

Results

Demographic Information

Ethnicity. Eighty-one percent (N=21) of the students were white and 15% (N=4) were Asian. One student did not specify an ethnic origin.

Residential location. Over half (54%) of the students lived in suburban areas and 12% (N=3) were from urban areas. Nine respondents reported that their families resided in rural areas.

Parental education. All the mothers and all the fathers but one had at least some college education. Fifty-four percent of the fathers and 50% of the mothers had more than 4 years of college.

Family income. Fifty-four percent (N=14) of the participating families earned above $50,000 annually. Eight percent (N=2) of the families had an income less than $20,000.

Sources of Information About Open Enrollment

Parents were asked to identify all sources of information about the Open Enrollment Option they used when deciding about

transferring from a list of possible sources (space was provided for any sources not listed) and to indicate which had been most valuable. The most frequent sources of information (62% each) reported by the parents were the school principal and the media. Thirty-one percent considered the principal the most valuable source; 27% considered the media the most valuable. In Table 1, we report the percentage of parents who used each source of information.

Involvement in School

We asked parents to indicate the extent to which they had been involved in their child's school before and after the transfer by checking possible school activities. More parents reported attending school events (100% vs. 73%), keeping teacher contacts (89% vs. 73%), and being involved in school committees (42% vs. 23%) at their chosen school than at the former school. None of the parents, either before or after the transfer, checked the item "not involved." Yet, 19% of the parents reported that transportation problems or a time constraint had limited their involvement at their chosen school. Figure 1 presents the percentage of each item endorsed by the parents before and after changing schools.

Reasons for Transferring

Parents were given 32 possible reasons for the transfer of their children and were asked to select all reasons that applied. Moreover, they had the option of commenting on any additional reasons. Almost all the parents (96%) indicated that their children transferred because the chosen school could provide more

Table 1

Sources of Information About Open Enrollment for Parents of Students who are Identified as Gifted

Source of information	% of Respondents Answering Each Item	Most Important
Teacher	4	0
Counselor	19	4
Principal or other administrator	62	31
Child/Children	15	0
Family member or relative	4	0
Friend or neighbor	27	4
Employer	4	0
Social worker	0	0
Brochure or flier	12	0
School newsletter or school paper	27	0
Radio, TV, or newspaper	62	27
Options hot-line	0	0
Informational meeting	8	4
Social service or community agency	0	0

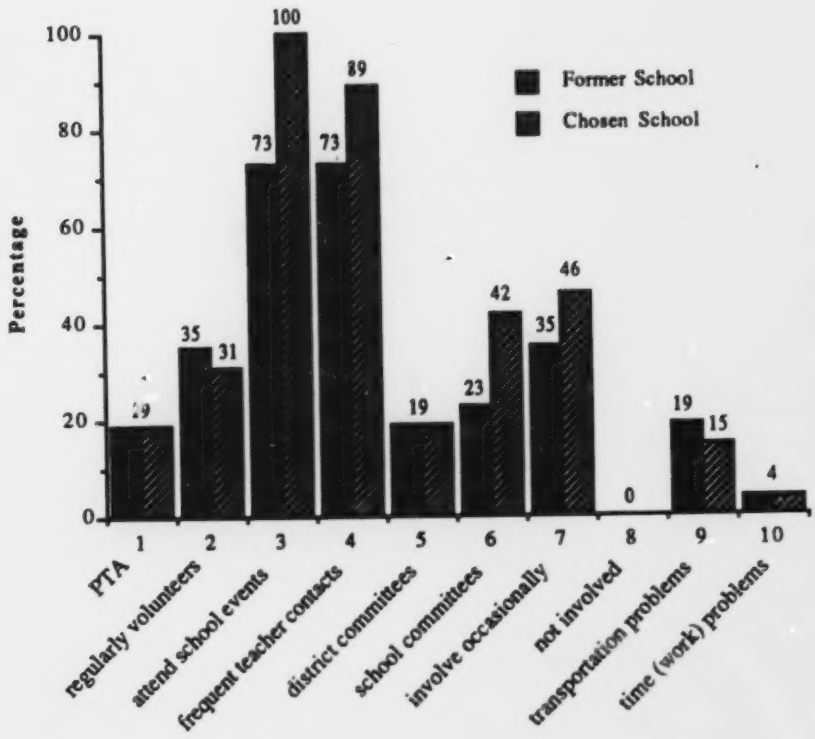

Figure 1. Involvement in school for parents of gifted and talented students

advanced courses and programs for students with special talents; 23% of the parents said this was the most important reason. Moreover, many parents identified school and program-related reasons, e.g., the chosen school offered more course variety (62%), the chosen school had better teachers (46%), and the chosen school had a strong academic reputation (42%). Other common reasons were related to individual and family needs. Many parents said they were unhappy with their former school district (62%), they believed that their children's educational needs were better met at their chosen school (50%), or their chosen school was closer to their work place (42%). Table 2 presents the percentage of each item selected by the parents.

Parent Comments

Nineteen parents of students who were served in gifted programs returned the survey with comments. Notably, these parents had a positive experience; many of them expressed satisfaction with the Open Enrollment Option and their chosen school. For instance, one parent reported being "very grateful" and reported that their "child [was] in the right school" after the transfer. The most frequently reported issues were in the areas of child's attitude and behavior change, curricula and extracurricular activities, and transportation/location. Many parents reported that their child's attitudes and behaviors had improved after school change. One parent said her child "didn't want to go to school any more when he went to [the resident school, but now] he [was] thrilled with each day at [the chosen school]." Also, many parents said they "wanted a wider variety of

Table 2

Reasons for Transferring for Parents of Students who are Identified as Gifted

Reason for Transferring	% of Total Endorsing Items	Most Important
**The chosen school is closer to home.*	12	0
**The chosen school is closer to my job (or my spouse's job.*	42	4
**The chosen school has a day-care program, or is closer to someone who takes care of my child.*	8	0
**Our child's friends, brothers, or sisters attend(ed) the new school.*	35	0
The chosen school is a nicer, cleaner building.	4	0
The chosen school is bigger and has more students.	31	0
The chosen school has fewer students.	4	0
The chosen school has smaller class sizes.	8	0
**The chosen school has easier graduation requirements.*	0	0
**Students at the chosen school get better grades and score higher on tests to get into colleges or jobs (like SAT, TABE, or ASVAB).*	42	8
The chosen school has better teachers.	46	0
The chosen school provides a safer environment.	0	0
**The chosen school offers more course variety.*	62	0
The chosen school has more advanced courses and programs for gifted students.	96	23
**My child's Special Education needs are better met at the chosen school.*	50	12
**The chosen school offers my child better athletic and extracurricular opportunities.*	31	0
The chosen school placed my child in a Special Education program and our school district would not.	12	0

Table 2 (continued)

Reasons for Transferring for Parents of Students who are Identified as Gifted

Reason for Transferring	% of Total Endorsing Items	Most Important
Teachers at the chosen school can give my child more personal attention.	19	4
The chosen school has fewer problems with student discipline.	12	0
**The chosen school gave my child a fresh start.*	12	4
**The chosen school might encourage my child to stay in school.*	12	0
**The chosen school has more opportunities for parent participation.*	15	0
School staff strongly urged my child to change schools.	0	0
The chosen school did not place my child in a Special Education Program, and our resident school district did.	0	0
The chosen school mainstreams my child into more regular education classes.	0	0
The chosen school has programs for children who do not speak English at home.	0	0
The chosen school gives my child more options in his/her Special Education program.	38	4
Special Education teachers at the chosen school keep me more informed of my child's progress.	19	0
We were happier with the social and economic background of the student body at the chosen school.	19	0
We were happier with the racial or ethnic composition of the student body at the chosen school.	19	0
We moved out of the district, but wanted our child to remain in old district for his/her education.	12	4
**We were unhappy with out former school district.*	62	19

**Items that are typed in italics are parallel items with Study 2*

academic, extracurricular and social choices" for their children. However, a similar number of parents complained about transportation problems. A common comment from these parents was, "Transportation was a major problem!"

Study 2: Survey of Families Participating in Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option

Method

The Minnesota Department of Education (1989) with cooperation from the U.S. Department of Education, designed a paper-and-pencil survey for all families participating in the Open Enrollment Option with approved applications to change school districts for the 1989-90 school year. The survey gathered demographic information on the families and probed their experience in exercising the Open Enrollment Option and its effects on them.

Participants

Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option requires participating families to submit an application to the district of their choice before January 1st of the desired year of transfer. Approved applications are then submitted to the state Department of Education. Applicants with approval to transfer their children for the 1989-90 school year served as the respondents to this survey.

Instrument

The survey consisted of 28 items, most in a multiple choice format. Several Likert-scale items and three open-ended items also were included. All families were asked to provide some demographic information. Families of children who actually

transferred were asked for additional information, such as whether the student had received special education services with an Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.), sources of information about the Open Enrollment Option, the family decision-making process, and effects of participating in the option. Several items were similar to those used in Study 1.

Procedures

Surveys were mailed to 2,663 participating families. Fifty-two percent (N=1,377) were returned with complete information. Of these, 75 parents reported that their children were receiving special education services with an I.E.P. From the other 1,302 we drew a random sample of 60 students who gave no indication of receiving special education services.

Results

Demographic Information

Ethnicity. A majority of the students were white (91%). The remaining 9% (N=5) were Asian, Hispanic, and Native American.

Residential location. About half (48%) of the participating families lived in rural areas. For the families who resided in metropolitan areas, almost twice as many were in suburban (33%) as in urban (18%) areas.

Parental education. Forty-one percent of the fathers and 37% of the mothers had a bachelor's or higher degree. Thirty-five percent of the fathers and 27% of the mothers had an educational attainment of high school or less.

Family income. Half of the families in this sample earned $30,000 to $50,000 annually. The mean family income fell between $30,000 and $40,000.

Sources of Information about Open Enrollment

Families were asked to identify all sources as well as the most valuable one, they used to obtain information about the Open Enrollment Option. They could specify another source if it was not covered in the list provided. Table 3 gives percentages for sources identified by the families. Media (37%) were the most frequently reported and were considered the most valuable source of information about Open Enrollment. About 18% of the families said the principal (the second most important source), their children, and school newsletters provided information about the program. They also learned about the program from their friends and neighbors (15%).

Involvement in School

Participating families were asked to check all activities in which they were involved at the former and chosen schools. Families reported being more active at the former school than at their chosen school: PTA (21% vs. 6%), district committees (23% vs. 11%), school committees (23% vs. 13%), and volunteering (32% vs. 9%). Twenty-four percent of the families said transportation had limited their involvement at their chosen school. However, fewer families reported not being involved at their chosen school (9%) than at the former school (17%). Reports of attendance at school events, "frequent" teacher contacts, and "occasional" involvement remained relatively constant before and after school

Table 3

Sources of Information About Open Enrollment for Families of Students Without Disabilities

Source of information	% of Respondents answering each item	Most Important
Teacher	7	0
Counselor	7	3
Principal or other administrator	18	12
Child/Children	17	7
Family member or relative	5	3
Friend or neighbor	15	5
Employer	5	5
Social worker	0	0
Brochure or flier	8	0
School newsletter or school paper	18	3
Radio, TV, or newspaper	37	25
Options hot-line	0	0
Informational meeting	3	2
Social service or community agency	0	0

changing schools. A comparison of family involvement in school before and after exercising the option is presented in Figure 2.

Reasons for Transferring

Participating families were given 14 possible reasons for transferring and asked to indicate all that applied, as well as the most important reason. Space was provided to supply reasons not listed. The most frequent reason was that the child's educational needs were better met at the chosen school (43%); families most often cited the strong academic reputation of the chosen school (17%) as the most important reason. Many chose a positive climate for learning (40%) and more course variety (35%). Only one reason - fewer graduation requirements - was never chosen. In Table 4 we report the percentage for each reason for transferring.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to delineate the characteristics of students who were identified as gifted and talented participating in the Open Enrollment Option, their experiences in exercising the option, and some implications of their participation. In so doing, we contrasted data on them to data on students with no special needs.

Most participants in both groups of students were white; only a few were minorities. Could we assume that most minority students are satisfied with their schools? If not, why did such a small number of students take advantage of Open Enrollment? To understand this issue further, we examined the residential location of the participating families. Our data indicated that

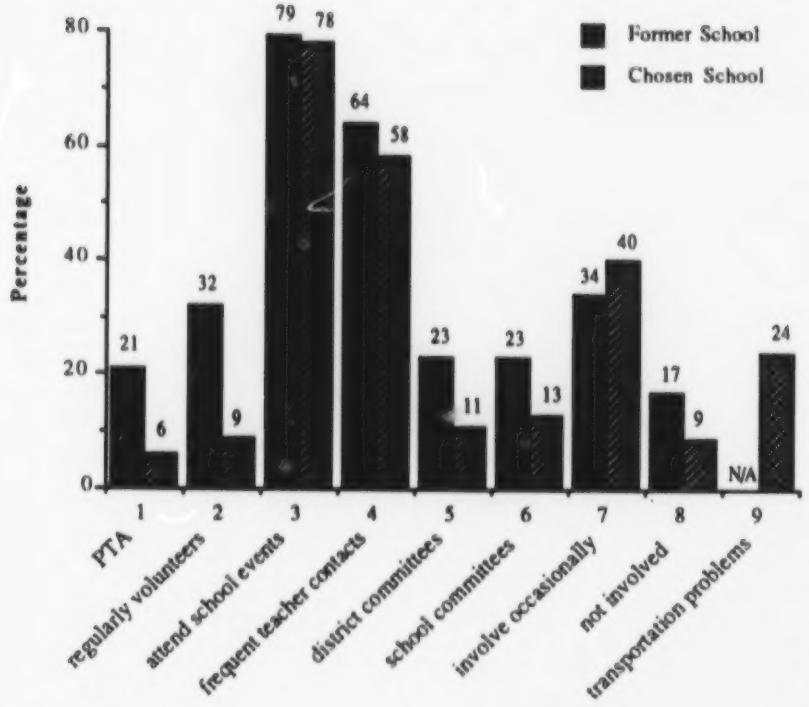

Figure 2. Involvement in school for parents of students without disabilities

Table 4

Reasons for Transferring for Families of Students Without Disabilities

Reason for Transferring	% of Total Endorsing Items	Most Important
The location of the new school is closer to our home.	28	7
The location of the new school is closer to my (my spouse's) job.	15	5
Our child's/children's friends attend the new school.	18	3
The educational services offered at the new school are more appropriate for my child/children.	43	7
The new school has a strong academic reputation (high test scores, good teachers, high college placement rate).	27	17
The new school offers more course variety.	35	5
The new school offers extended day programs (before/after school care) or is more convenient to private child care provider.	3	2
The new school has more opportunities for parent participation.	10	0
The new school has fewer graduation requirements.	0	0
The new school offers my child/children better athletic and extracurricular opportunities.	25	0
We were unhappy with the school board in the old school district.	25	5
The new school offers my child/children a fresh start.	3	2
The new school might encourage my child/children to stay in school.	7	0
The new school has a very positive climate for learning.	40	8

most resided in suburban and rural areas. In Minnesota, large inner city school districts have many minority students; moreover, these school districts often offer more educational choices through intradistrict choice programs. Perhaps many of these students have already been offered educational choices through their inner city schools. Or, obstacles such as lack of information and transportation problems may work against their participation. The reasons why many minorities do not exercise the option should be investigated further.

When parental education was examined, 66% of the fathers and 73% of the mothers of students with special talents and 41% of the fathers and 37% of the mothers of students without special needs had a bachelor's or higher degree. According to the Census of Population and Housing (1992), only 22% of people (25 or older) in Minnesota have that much education. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the middle-age generation, which includes most of the survey respondents, has more education opportunities than the older generation. However, we cannot ignore the possibility that well-educated parents are more likely to take advantage of Open Enrollment. Walford (1992) reported two studies of educational choice in Great Britain that concluded that more educated parents were more likely to have made an educational choice for their children. Although Great Britain and the United States differ culturally and politically, the observed over-participation of highly educated parents in England should alert educators when examining the merits of school choice in America.

To further understand how a family's socioeconomic status affects their participation in Open Enrollment, we studied the household incomes of the participating families. In Minnesota, 30% of people between 25 and 64 have an annual income above $50,000 (Census of Population and Housing, 1992). Our surveys indicated that 54% of families of students with special talents and 10% of families of students without special needs earned above $50,000 each year. Yet, 6% of the families of students without special needs earned below $10,000 compared to 8% of the general Minnesota population. Family income differs between these types of students, with students identified as gifted and talented being more likely to come from more affluent families. However, students do appear to participate in the option regardless of how rich or poor their families are. Apparently, participation in Open Enrollment for most students is more closely related to parental education level than to how much money a family earns, but for students identified as gifted and talented, those exercising the option are from families with high educational attainment and higher income levels. However, this may be a function of the gifted and talented population and not a function of choice. The issue is then how to enable <u>all</u> parents to make an educational choice for their children regardless of their own educational attainment.

Parents of students who were identified as gifted and talented and parents of students without special needs mostly relied on the mass media for information about Open Enrollment. Parents of students who were served in gifted programs also

actively sought information from the principal. No parent in either group used the toll-free Choice hotline established by the Department of Education, and very few relied on brochures and fliers specific to Open Enrollment. To what extent are parents underinformed about Open Enrollment when it is no longer considered "news"? Some proponents of school choice have stressed the importance of proper information. Geiger (1991) stated, "For parents to make meaningful choices, they need information. For choice to be equitable, all parents must have this information, whether they speak English or not, are educated or not educated, are rich or poor" (p. 55). Randall and Geiger (1991) suggested that the state Board of Education and the state Department of Education might assume the responsibility for informing the public. Based on our data, no matter who is responsible for providing the information about choice plans, a more vigorous outreach program may be required in order to ensure that all parents are properly informed.

We learned from the surveys that parents of students who were identified as gifted and talented moderately increased their involvement at their chosen school, especially in school events and school committees. Parents of students without special needs showed a drop in school involvement, especially in such community service areas as PTA, volunteering, district committees, and school committees. These parents, however, had maintained a similar amount of involvement in activities directly related to their children, such as teacher contact and attendance at school events. An important observation was that the amount of

involvement for both groups of parents at the former school was very similar (see Figures 1 and 2). Why, then, was there a difference in school involvement between the two groups *after* the transfer? For one thing, more parents of students without special needs (24% vs. 15%) indicated that transportation had limited their involvement. In addition, families of students with special talents could have more family resources (e.g., higher household income). Therefore, legitimate issues such as time, distance, money, and transportation should be included in the discussion of school involvement in school choice. Parents who want to be involved at the non-resident school of their child may find it impractical.

Parents of students who were identified as gifted and talented used Open Enrollment as a vehicle for getting a more rigorous and advanced curriculum for their children. These parents transferred their children because they believed the new school could better develop their children's full potential. They believed that their resident schools fell short in the areas of curriculum, academic reputation, quality of teachers, course variety, and special need (giftedness); such concerns drove the decision to transfer. Similarly, parents of students without special needs focused on their children's needs for educational service, course variety, and learning environment. Based on these data, it is fair to say that academic and educational concerns rank among the major reasons why parents of both types of students transfer their children. Furthermore, many parents of students who were identified as gifted and talented listed "the chosen

school is closer to my or my spouse's job" as a reason for transferring. In other words, practicality did play an important role in school selection. Therefore, when discussing choice in education, family needs should not be overlooked because they often play an important role.

Many parents of students who were identified as gifted and talented expressed satisfaction with Open Enrollment. They were pleased that their children could transfer to a school or program where their special talents of their children might be better cultivated. Moreover, many parents reported that their children had improved academically and behaviorally after the transfer. In order to make an intelligent choice, parents need to be well informed about the option, the characteristics and the performance of the schools in the state, and the details of all available programs. The responsibility of providing such comprehensive information may lie with the state government and gifted education advocacy groups, since it is unlikely that individual school districts will "advertise" schools and programs of other districts and thus risk losing "customers."

Transportation poses another obstacle to exercising the Open Enrollment Option. Barriers of distance, time, money, and shortage of vehicles create a hardship for many parents to access the school of choice. In Minnesota, transportation reimbursement funds are available for families with incomes at or below the poverty line; however, many families who may need the help do not qualify. The controlled choice plan in St. Louis, on the other hand, provides free transportation for all participating students.

Susan Uchitelle (1989), executive director of the St. Louis Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council, said, "We must stop talking about sand castles (i.e., hypothetical programs with no firm substance or grounding) and start admitting that true choice plans will be expensive and complex." Until the problem of transportation is resolved, some parents who want to transfer a child with special talents to a new school are bound to be disappointed.

In reviewing the literature, we find that educational reforms have sparked a heated debate among educators interested in gifted education. Some (e.g., Gallagher, 1991; Renzulli & Reiss, 1991) have clearly articulated disappointments in recent reform movements. Yet, none has discussed the effects of Open Enrollment on students in gifted programs and the impact of their participation on the educational system. Positively, students who are identified as gifted and talented, as well as others, are exercising the Open Enrollment Option to transfer to the school or program of their choice.

If parents of students who are identified as gifted and talented "shop around" for a more rigorous curriculum, how would schools respond? Would they raise their standards and advance their curriculum to attract these students? Would schools improve to benefit all students, or become segregated by ability? Would a group of Minnesota teachers create innovative teaching methods and an advanced curriculum to establish an outcome-based charter school specifically targeting students with special talents? Recently, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 101-

476) called for greater integration of students with severe disabilities and their peers. How would that apply to students with special talents and their participation in public school choice? School choice is here and it has shown itself to be a complex and dynamic process; moreover, students who are identified as gifted and talented are participating in different choice plans. Their participation in public school choice should be taken seriously.

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